Involving the Profession in Validating National Professional Standards for Teachers

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The National Centre of Science, ICT, and Mathematics Education for Rural and Regional Australia (SiMERR National Centre) at the University of New England was successful in winning the first major research tender offered by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). This large-scale and nationally significant research endeavour will undertake the validation study of the Draft National Professional Standards for Teachers of Australia prior to the Standards being adopted by every State and Territory during 2011.

The research team from the SiMERR National Centre at the University of New England comprises Professor John Pegg, Dr Greg McPhan, Dr Bruce Mowbray and Mr Trevor Lynch. Members of the AITSL Board as well as a specially designated Steering Group, identified by AITSL, support the research team.

The research commissioned by AITSL comes under MCEECDYA, the national body of state and territory ministers of education. An important consequence of this organisational structure means that the findings of the study will offer a uniform national and empirically validated framework of Professional Teaching Standards to underpin the career aspirations of every primary and secondary teacher in Australia across all education jurisdictions.

The National Professional Standards for Teachers describe, under four levels of professional expertise, what teachers should know and be able to do. The four levels of expertise (or career stage) are: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead Teacher. These four levels present a framework that offers a national direction and structure to guide the preparation, support and development of teachers. They reflect a continuum of a teacher’s developing professional expertise from undergraduate preparation through to being a leader in the profession.

Overall, the Standards provide a common language for professional discussions between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public. They make explicit the knowledge, skills and attributes required at each of the four career stages.

The Validation is designed to gather information from teachers across Australia in such a way that each career stage, reflects the views and aspirations of classroom teachers. Also, significantly that the construct of the standards is empirically established by taking into account teacher perceptions, experiences and accounts of their own development and of the nature of their work.

The Validation comprises three studies. The first two involve psychometric analysis of two sets of surveys directed at teachers (primary and secondary) in each State and Territory. Both survey sets will examine teachers’ perceptions of the standards (closed questions) and commentary on them (open questions). The third study
involves National Focus Group Workshops involving high-quality teachers and stakeholder groups in each State and Territory.

The timeframes for the study are tight with data collection commencing in late August for Study 1, and mid October for Studies 2 and 3. Teachers outside of the targeted sample are asked to look for announcements in the press and through information supplied by professional organisations in mid October that will indicate when Study 2 is on-line. A report on the research is to be completed by the end of the year.